



REPORT OF THE AUDITOR
GENERAL OF QUÉBEC
TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
FOR 2019-2020

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HIGHLIGHTS

Report of the Sustainable
Development Commissioner



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Limitations of the Voluntary Adoption of a Sustainable Development Approach

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Please note that the text of Chapter 1 is not translated into English.

Highlights

Work Objectives

So that municipal and school bodies as well as health and social services institutions may voluntarily undertake a sustainable development approach, the *Government Sustainable Development Strategy 2015-2020* provides for an imperative activity and the setting up of advisory-support tables.

Our audit was aimed at:

- assessing whether the audited entities ensure that the tables effectively play their role;
- assessing whether the Ministère de l'Environnement et de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques (MELCC) ensures that the government departments and agencies contribute to the imperative activity no. 5;
- determining whether the MELCC is monitoring changes in the proportion of organizations not subject to the Act that have undertaken a sustainable development approach, are assessing the contribution and report on it.

The Report is available at www.vgq.qc.ca (in French only).

Audit Results

The following are the principal findings of our audit concerning the application of the *Sustainable Development Act* in 2018-2019. The audited entities are the Ministère des Affaires municipales et de l'Habitation (MAMH), the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur (MEES), the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) and the MELCC.

The organizations responsible for a large part of public sector activities have not made the changes hoped for with respect to sustainable development. The figures obtained show that a small proportion of organizations in the municipal, education and health and social services sectors not subject to the Act undertook a sustainable development approach, and targets are far from being attained.

Thought and review could rightly be given to the effectiveness of the incentives put in place and to the actions to be taken so that the organizations not subject to the Act become engaged in the government approach.

The mechanisms introduced in the 2015-2020 strategy to encourage organizations not subject to the Act to undertake a sustainable development approach have not been very effective. For example, a number of shortcomings are evident with the advisory-support tables, including frequency of meetings, the quality of the advisory-support plans and their follow-up and with regard to awareness-building and support activities offered.

The MELCC monitors changes in the proportion of organizations that have undertaken a sustainable development approach, but does not assess their contribution to the 2015-2020 strategy. The accountability reporting offered does not establish a complete, representative picture of the situation.

Recommendations

The Auditor General has made recommendations to the MAMH, the MEES, the MSSS and the MELCC. They are all shown to the right.

The audited entities had the opportunity to comment on the report; their comments can be found in the *Commentaires des entités auditées* section.

We want to point out that they accepted all the recommendations.

Recommendations to the Ministère des Affaires municipales et de l'Habitation, the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur and the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux

- 4** Improve the effectiveness of the advisory-support table.
- 7** Submit, to the Comité interministériel du développement durable, the next analysis reports related to the surveys, which include information on the data collection method, survey limits and the analysis of the findings, and make them public.

Recommendation to the Ministère des Affaires municipales et de l'Habitation and the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur

- 2** Utilize a method providing for a more accurate picture of the proportion of organizations not subject to the Act that undertook a sustainable development approach.

Recommendation to the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur and the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux

- 3** Assess the contribution of public schools and health and social services sector installations to the sustainable development approaches undertaken by the school boards and health and social services institutions.

Recommendations to the Ministère de l'Environnement et de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques

- 1** Define the criteria to be used to assess whether an organization has undertaken a sustainable development approach.
 - 5** Indicate the government departments and agencies called on to take part in imperative activity no. 5 and ensure that their actions help increase the proportion of organizations that have undertaken a sustainable development approach.
 - 6** Inform the Comité interministériel du développement durable of the small proportion of organizations not subject to the Act that undertook a sustainable development approach, of targets that are not being reached and the lack of effectiveness of the incentives put in place, so as to give well-informed consideration of the actions to be taken to favour these organizations' engagement in the government approach.
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Highlights

Work Objectives

The *Act Respecting Occupational Health and Safety* first and foremost addresses the prevention of employment injuries. Its object is the elimination, at the source, of dangers to the health, safety and physical well-being of workers.

The Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CNESST) administers the occupational health and safety plan. One of the CNESST's goals is to have work places take charge of health and safety.

The purpose of our work was to ensure that:

- the CNESST exercises leadership in prevention in occupational health and safety so as to eliminate, at the source, dangers to the health, safety and physical well-being of workers;
- the CNESST effectively and efficiently conducts its interventions in prevention in occupational health and safety.

The Report is available at www.vgq.qc.ca (in French only).

Audit Results

The following are the principal findings of our audit concerning prevention in occupational health and safety.

The CNESST does not wholly fulfill its role as an agent of change in terms of modernizing the prevention aspect of the plan with respect to occupational health and safety. As a result, Québec is markedly lagging behind other jurisdictions, and inequities among workers persist in matters of prevention.

The emphasis that the CNESST places on prevention in its strategic plans has lessened over time. In addition, there is room for improvement regarding the information it provides to its board of directors for determining its budgetary directions in prevention.

Though the employers' contribution-rate structures are meant to encourage employers to exercise prevention in occupational health and safety, employers may not give prevention the desired degree of importance, while still taking advantage of lower rates. In addition, current rate structures offer small businesses few incentives for prevention.

Some activity sectors have yet to benefit from the services of partners to provide employers and workers with support in prevention management. As well, the CNESST does not ensure the optimization of its partners' interventions.

The CNESST is not very proactive with regard to latent or emerging risks when identifying and prioritizing the risks to be considered during its occupational health and safety inspections.

The planning of inspections based on identified priorities is inefficient. In addition, the CNESST is unable to demonstrate that its inspections actually covered the elements prioritized by it.

The CNESST does not provide its inspectors with a very high degree of guidance in assessing how well health and safety is enforced in the workplace and improvements to the inspection process are slow to be implemented. This adversely impacts on the consistency and effectiveness of its inspections.

The CNESST does not ensure that its experienced inspectors are kept current in their field and that the support offered by its network of expertise is sufficient, so as to foster the quality and consistency of its inspections throughout the province.

Recommendations

The Auditor General has made recommendations to the CNESST. They are all shown to the right.

The audited entity had the opportunity to comment on the report; its comments can be found in the *Commentaires de l'entité auditée* section.

We want to point out that it accepted all the recommendations.

However, some comments of the CNESST have generated a reaction from us, which follows the comments of the CNESST.

Recommendations to the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail

- 1** Implement the means necessary to modernize the occupational health and safety plan.
 - 2** Ensure that its strategic and budgetary directions reflect the importance that must be granted to prevention in occupational health and safety.
 - 3** Propose incentives that take actual account of work done in the area of prevention.
 - 4** Provide employers in sectors not covered by joint sector-based associations with the necessary support.
 - 5** Optimize its' partners' activities so as to ensure greater impact in the workplace.
 - 6** Improve the quality of information used to identify health and safety risks in the workplace.
 - 7** Be more proactive in monitoring latent and emerging risks.
 - 8** Make inspection planning more efficient by structuring it on a priority basis.
 - 9** Better evaluate the scope of its inspections, in terms of its priorities for interventions, so as to provide a more accurate reporting of them.
 - 10** Provide its inspectors with clear directives and tools in order to enhance inspection effectiveness and consistency, including the evaluation of how well the workplaces have enforced health and safety.
 - 11** Make sure that its experienced inspectors stay current in their field and that its network of expertise provides sufficient support.
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Highlights

Work Objective

The Green Fund was created in 2006 to promote sustainable development in Québec. It is overseen by the Ministère de l'Environnement et de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques (MELCC). In 2017, governance of the Fund was reformed, leading to the establishment of the Conseil de gestion du Fonds vert (CGFV).

The report presents the various elements in support of our decision to postpone the comprehensive assessment of the implementation of the Green Fund reform, which was requested by the Committee on Public Administration.

The Report is available at www.vgq.qc.ca (in French only).

Work Results

In 2014, we published an audit report on Green Fund activities and subsequently followed up on the implementation of the recommendations stemming from the audit. In April 2016, the Committee on Public Administration held a hearing on our follow-up report published two months earlier. Following this hearing, the Committee asked the Sustainable Development Commissioner to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of the Green Fund reform.

In our opinion, it is not appropriate at this time to respond to the request of the Committee on Public Administration to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of the Green Fund reform. Shortcomings identified in our audits remain and new problematic situations relative to the management of the Green Fund have been observed since its reform. This is particularly the case with regard to the interpretation of the respective roles and responsibilities of the MELCC and the CGFV. As well, these two entities indicated their intention to continue their work on improving Fund management.

Nearly five years after the publication of our initial audit report on the Green Fund, we regret this situation. We would like to underscore the importance of the objectives of the Green Fund, that considerable sums are at stake and that parliamentarians' interest in this sustainable development tool has not wavered.

